



## Brown Bagging It

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Bringing your lunch to work or school is a great way to save money. It can also be a way to get a healthier breakfast and lunch. A bowl of oatmeal topped with berries and a thermos of coffee is cheaper and healthier than a donut and fancy coffee drink. While bringing food from home has its benefits, it is still important to follow these food safety rules when preparing.

## Safe Lunches Start in the Kitchen

When preparing, transporting, and eating your lunch, keep the food safety steps in mind: **clean, separate, cook, and chill.**

### Clean:

- ◆ Wash hands with warm, soapy water before preparing food.
- ◆ Wash counter tops and utensils with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item.
- ◆ Clean lunch tote often.

### Separate:

- ◆ Use one cutting board for fresh produce and another one for meat and poultry to avoid cross-contamination.
- ◆ After lunch, discard all used disposable food packaging and paper bags. Do not reuse

packaging because it could contaminate other food and cause foodborne illness.

### Chill:

- ◆ Keeping food cold slows bacteria growth.
- ◆ Harmful bacteria multiply quickly in the danger zone (40°-140°F).
- ◆ Keep perishable food refrigerated until it is time to leave home.
- ◆ Include a frozen ice pack, juice box, or water bottle with perishable food in an insulated lunch tote.
- ◆ If possible, use an insulated soft-sided bag. It's best for keeping food cold.
- ◆ Store perishable items in a refrigerator (if available) immediately upon arrival.



## Dining at Your Desk

According to the American Dietetic Association, some 70% of Americans eat lunch at their desks several times a week. This can lead to poor nutritional choices and food safety problems.

"The desk was not designed to be an eating place," says Rick Hall, RD, MS, a faculty member at Arizona State University in Phoenix. "So spending your lunch hour in front of your computer brings with it a number of issues."

One of the biggest drawbacks is that you're not focused on your food. "Eating at your desk encourages mindless eating and overeating," says Susan Moore, RD, a spokeswoman for the ADA. "You're most likely multi-tasking and not paying attention to the amount of food you're eating."

"Eating at your desk also prevents you from getting up and out of the office," says Moore. "You need to get the heart pumping and the blood flowing again, and lunch is an important time to do that. If you sit at your desk eating, you lose the opportunity."



And on top of those issues there are **food safety concerns**.

- ◆ If you get called away from your desk, your food is sitting out. This could potentially delay eating for an hour or two. If you have perishables, sitting in the danger zone becomes a problem.
- ◆ Your desk, in terms of bacteria, is 400 times more dirty than your toilet," says Charles Gerba, PhD, a professor of environmental microbiology at the University of Arizona in Tucson. "People turn their desks into bacteria cafeterias because they eat at them, but they never clean them. The phone is the dirtiest, the desktop is next, and the mouse and the computer follow."

## Tips for a Safer Lunch



1. Disinfect your desk. Wiping the whole desk area with disinfection wipes once a day is enough to get it clean.
2. Avoid touching your phone, keyboard, and mouse while eating.
3. Use a placemat. They create a barrier between food and the bacteria.
4. Don't make it a habit. *Get away from your desk at lunch time to clear your head, catch up with friends, or just relax.*